

Canadian Historical GIS Partnership Development Project Meeting

Date: August 20th, 2015

Location: Department of Geography and Planning, University of Toronto, Sidney Smith Hall - 100 St. George St., Room 5017-A (5th floor)

Minutes Organized as per Agenda

Section A: Introductory Session

Section B: White Papers

Section C: Next steps and decision-making

Attendees

Executive:

Marcel Fortin (University of Toronto), Byron Moldofsky (University of Toronto), Léon Robichaud (Université de Sherbrooke), Don Lafreniere (Michigan Technological University), John Lutz (University of Victoria) by Skype

Partners:

Colleen Beard (Brock University Library), Glenn Brauen (University of Toronto), Jennifer Bonnell (McMaster University), Jim Clifford (University of Saskatchewan), Ken Sylvester (University of Michigan), Robert Sweeny (Memorial University of Newfoundland), Brent Hall (Esri Canada), Iain Greensmith (Esri Canada), Jonathan van Dusen (Esri Canada), John Wilson (Toronto Green Community), Helen Mills (Toronto Green Community), Marc St.-Hilaire (Université Laval)

RAs:

Daniel Trepal (RA) (Michigan Technological University), Kevin Roy (University of Toronto), Kathleen Watt (University of Toronto), Sonia Blouin (Université de Sherbrooke)

Regrets:

Daniel Brendle-Moczuk (University of Victoria Library), Geoff Cunfer (University of Saskatchewan), Josh MacFadyen (Arizona State University), Larry Laliberte (University of Alberta Library), Marcy Burchfield (Neptis Foundation)

Meeting Minutes – abridged for website

Approval or amendment of agenda

Approved

Section A: Introductory Session

A0. Introductions

- CHGIS group members introduced themselves and their institutions

A1. Review of meeting goals

- Marcel Fortin reviewed the meeting goals: To develop a two year plan, including consideration of: administrative matters such as data sharing and storage; creating and connecting the HGIS community; developing partnerships with other institutions; developing a culture of openness and collaboration between academia and the public regarding Historical Geographic Information Systems (HGIS)
- To discuss portal development
- To discuss structure and content of white papers: target audience, approach to collaborative development, need for coordination; opportunities for publication

A2. Progress to date

- **Website:** Byron Moldofsky reviewed progress to date on project informational website: Wordpress-based site set up and ready for development. Not public yet. Byron proposed new committee that will help direct project website development. Several folks volunteered to assist. Discussion of practicality of blog posting – decided that monthly updates would be more achievable. Discussion of bilingual nature of site – decided essential, from initial launch. Discussion of naming of project and website – efforts will be made to make this more “user-friendly.” Discussion of audience for site – determined for public consumption but aimed at potential users of HGIS and contributors to partnership.
- **Esri Canada Paper:** Brent Hall explained that Esri has reviewed the most prominent Canadian HGIS portal sites and platforms (Esri and Open source), and would like input on the work to help in moving forward. (see B5 below.) A White Paper on Geoportal options will be written based on the current draft paper as a starting point. Esri will also set up a series of software ‘sandboxes’ for project members to test. Stressed objectivity, but will participate as long as ESRI tools are included in the mix of options.
- **Community building:** Ongoing email list is growing (approx. 50 more), and through the website it will continue. Report on several conference presentations (ACMLA, CCA.) Marcel Fortin discussed the importance of using the planned mid-term CHGIS conference to invite additional people and get their input on our findings, and build a wider partnership for future project applications.

Section B. White Papers

B1. Standards/Data Management. Leader: Marcel Fortin

Marcel Fortin presented his suggested approach to the White paper on Standards and Data management for Historical GIS. Some comments followed:

- Historians would find a 'standards' paper particularly helpful as this is an aspect of research that they do not often consider. Emphasis should be on what is unique about the historical GIS data and associated standards
- Suggestion of a how-to, or best practices format to provide researchers with a guide to follow if they are not familiar with this aspect of research
- Relationship to forthcoming SSHRC standard data requirements; present researchers with the minimum steps that will be required to curate the data as per SSHRC requirements given limited resources. Alternatively, this project may be able to influence the standards set in the future.
- The paper could be used as a reference when making grant funding proposals
- Raises question of what will be the curation model going forward? General agreement that for Librarians and Historians an indefinite curation period is desirable. MF notes that it is only major institutions that will be able to offer the security and longevity necessary for this project, not individual researchers.
- Suggestion to invite someone from SSHRC to join this whitepaper for an 'insider' view.

B2. Visualization Methods. Leader: Jim Clifford and Byron Moldofsky

Jim Clifford presented a number of visualization websites to emphasize the number of options that are available. Design of paper still quite open, but suggestions were:

- Identify good options for visualization (not specific sites or tools, rather, methods, depending on requirements. Eg. various kinds of "story-telling" maps when narrative needed.
- Develop a framework, or a series of questions/options, to try and determine what a researcher intends to show, and mount something online to demonstrate that. i.e. examples won't be particularly helpful, better to help researchers narrow down the options that are available to them. A web app to facilitate this would be developed online in year 2.
- Consensus on the clarification that web HGIS is the main thrust, rather than any other medium.
- A key aspect of the white paper should be to bring people to the realization that a visualization is an analytical tool, not just a narrative one. Despite this, information needs curation by to facilitate useful exploration
- JC: While there is a lot of possibilities, we don't have the time or resources to develop new methods/platforms; JC asks for suggested feasible directions. Also suggests that there is a strong Computer Science visualization literature that can/needs to be used to support the History focus of this paper

- Suggested that having conversations with organizations that are already a step ahead may be effective – i.e. to lean on pre-existing resources.

B3. Inventory of Canadian HGIS datasets

Léon Robichaud presented planned format of white paper (print and online) and goals of the paper. This is to create an initial database to manage information and guide researchers to pertinent HGIS datasets online.

- This is not a “how to build your map guide”, but there could be workshops on this, but that’s something different – not here.
- This paper would be distributed on websites and networks.
- Committee members should include map librarian members
- This paper addresses a broad range of data, so restricting it to datasets that relate to Canada is reasonable.
- Discussion on what is considered georeferenced data vs. ungeoreferenced data. Even though data is not georeferenced precisely it can still be tagged and relevant to researchers – “georeferenceable”?

B4. Emerging Technologies

Don Lafreniere presented three possible approaches to the white paper:

1. Data processing technologies – new ways of collecting historical spatial data: online georeferencing, auto-vectorization, OCR historical texts, ground penetrating radar, etc.
 2. Historical Spatial Data Infrastructure – HSDIs - How it has been done, how it should be done – need to accommodate different spatial and spatial scales
 3. Space-time interfaces – need to expand from traditional space-time cube visualization to more realistic and historical views. Visualization linkages (overlap B2), also link to Citizen Historian VGI type projects
- Rather than cover all of these superficially, Don is leaning towards one paper on how to use some of these emerging technologies to do public outreach – an Emerging Technologies in HGIS Education Whitepaper.
 - Wide-ranging discussion of possibilities – dissemination, Public Participatory GIS, 3D modelling, procedural modelling, mobile HGIS apps, etc.
 - Robert Sweeny suggested an alternative/additional paper on Canadian HSDIs could be written on the unique history and perspective of HGIS in Canada. Why is Canadian HGIS different? Possible survey of where we’ve been, what Canada’s done, and possibly where it might go in the future; will include rural and urban areas. It could be a survey written as a narrative. **Executive** to confirm whether Robert will write this paper or not. Robert is open to collaborators.
 - Discussion around indigenous oral histories being incorporated in CHGIS project. Where could this fit in?

B5. ESRI Canada portal paper

Jonathan van Dusen (and Brent Hall): wrote and presented “A Review of Geospatial Portal Software for a Canadian Historical GIS Infrastructure.”

- Esri Canada has identified needs and has looked at existing portals to determine potential solutions for the CHGIS project.
- Next step: Create ‘sandboxed’ environment with several of these portals available for experimentation.
- Discussion around Esri Canada licensing and credits for ArcGIS online for this group. Not a problem at this stage as the group will have access to software via university site licenses. University credits should be sufficient for these needs.
- Discussion around portals in other countries: What portals do other countries use? Does Esri participate in portals with other countries? This should be investigated and possibly a comparison included in paper.

B6. Education Opportunities in using HGIS (year 2)

- As discussed in B3 above, Don Lafreniere will be the lead for this paper, and it will be moved up to year 1. Several members volunteer to participate.

Section C. Next Steps and Decision-making

This research project can set HGIS standards in Canada, teach others best practices and build the community.

C1. Discussion around White papers timeline:

- For the large group meeting in April/May 2016, we will have shareable draft versions ready, and plan to present the results for discussion and planning.
- Benchmarks for measuring progress should be set by each individual whitepaper group with reasonable deadlines.
- Each White paper group will include a member of Executive. Responsible for coordination and to avoid duplication between white papers. Executive will meet every month starting September 2015 – as part of agenda will check in on progress of each whitepaper.

C2. Discussion around spring meeting:

- The spring meeting will have a much larger group and the “friends of the project” list will be invited to attend. Video conferencing is available, and some travel funding for group members.
- One day for a public conference and possibly a second day for the core group meeting. **Executive** to discuss this, then ask for full group consensus.

C3. Discussion of research being open as per SSHRC guidelines:

- University of Calgary Press might be interested in publishing white papers as chapters as part of a book. Keep options open and discuss as things progress.
- For SSHRC, scholarly peer reviewed papers must be published in an open access journal.

Adjournment.